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PREVENTION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST AND THE PROTECTION OF MINORITIES

Written statement submitted by Pax Christi International, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[16 July 1998]

GE.98-13481 (E)

Intervention on East Timor

1. Pax Christi International would like to thank the Chairperson and the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities for this opportunity to present an intervention on the question of East Timor.

2. Pax Christi International, the international Catholic peace movement, appreciates your efforts in working towards the protection of minorities. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights and General Assembly resolution 1514 (XV) of 14 December 1960 on decolonization, and Security Council resolutions 384 (1975) and 389 (1976) provide a basis for working for human rights, especially the right to self-determination.

3. Pax Christi International is in regular contact with East Timorese people both resident and in exile, and with East Timor support groups throughout Europe, including Portugal, as well as in Australia, New Zealand, India and the Philippines. Some of the latter have first-hand experience of conditions in East Timor from having visited the country.

4. The chief conflict areas continue to be as follows:

(a) Economic injustices experienced by the East Timorese in relation to access to resources both natural and social, to work opportunities and profits. Natural assets of marble, oil and trees with which the island is naturally endowed, continue to be stripped from it by the Indonesian business community with the authorization of the Government. The local indigenous people are denied the right of participation in decision-making, work opportunities or a share in any profit from these industries. Cash crops also being harvested, for example, coffee and fishing, are completely under the control and management of multinationals.

(b) The continued and excessive military presence, both overt and military intelligence. Forces include regular police, mobile brigade police, infantry battalions units of Indonesian special forces, at least one air force battalion, local territorial troops and paramilitary forces, estimated at between 40,000 and 70,000. There can be no solution to the problem of East Timor while the people live under occupation. At least 52 people were killed by Indonesian security personnel during 1997.

(c) The continued violation of human rights. East Timorese people continue to be made victims of oppression, arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, torture, and even extrajudicial execution, while at the same time being denied the right of lawful assembly and political activity. Over 300 persons were detained in February and March alone this year. Most victims were from the student, labour and pro-democracy movements. We would draw particular attention to the use of a law which forbids criticism of State policy (No. 5/PNPS/1963). The maximum penalty is five years. Activists concerned with East Timor appear to have been especially targeted in this regard.

(d) Poor social care particularly in relation to health. East Timor has one of the highest incidences of tuberculosis in the world. Many people die of malaria; malnutrition is widespread, and diarrhoea, chest infections and intestinal parasites cause great suffering. There is little health education work, apart from heavy advertising campaigns for immunization and contraception.

5. Pax Christi International strongly recommends, therefore, that the Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities initiate actions to reverse the annexation of East Timor by Indonesia and its effect on the people.

6. Interim initial steps which could be taken until that is achieved should include:

- setting up an independent human rights commission in Dili to safeguard all basic human rights in the territory, as well as freedom of political activity and assembly, including the abolition of repressive laws used against people who are claiming the right to free expression;

- immediate and unconditional release of all East Timorese political prisoners;

- access to the territory by United Nations specialized agencies such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund, the World Health Organization and others, for the purpose of carrying out, within their respective fields of competence, a comprehensive programme of restoration and protection of the environment, voluntary resettlement of displaced persons, district development projects, women and children care and public health;

- appointment of a Resident Representative of the Secretary-General in East Timor, responsible for the implementation of all United Nations activities in the territory and for reporting on the implementation of the accords;

- that until the annexation of East Timor is reversed, the Government of Indonesia be required to broaden its agenda to include good governance, human rights issues, environmental sustainability, people-centred development and total respect for the culture, language and ethnicity of the indigenous people of East Timor; and

- the sense of threat from the occupying forces needs to be lifted by their drastic reduction, and even complete withdrawal, the immediate cessation of all armed activities in East Timor and the removal of all heavy weapons, long-range artillery pieces and armed transport equipment.